

Traditional Aquatic Games of the Bodo Children: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Traditional games are played on the reliance on the natural environment. Contingent upon seasonal variations, various traditional games are engaged in by the Bodo children inhabiting in rural areas. For the purposes of recreational activities and to pass their time, since ancient times, Bodo children have collectively engaged in various traditional games as a medium for entertainment. The traditional games have multiple health and emotional benefits. The Bodo children residing in the Kochugaon region have been collectively participating in these games, which serve as a source of joy and amusement. Through participation in aquatic games, the Bodo children of Kochugaon have developed social cohesion and swimming proficiency. The aquatic games necessitate physical exertions, providing children with opportunities to acquire strong physical well-being. Furthermore, these games help in maintaining personal hygiene. Despite the multiple health benefits associated with these games, the present young generation has been observed to lack engagement in such games. For this reason, the traditional aquatic games of Kochugaon are now on the verge of precarious existence. In light of the present status of traditional aquatic games, this research study is undertaken.

KEYWORDS: traditional games, aquatic games, variations, benefits, disadvantage, and present status

1. Introduction

The Bodos represent an ethno linguistic group that possesses a distinct language, cultural practices, and religious beliefs. Since the ages, the Bodos have maintained a cohesive existence within rural areas. Every individual living in the rural area actively engages in a multitude of social activities. Moreover, they have practiced various cultural and social customs. The Bodos residing in rural areas engage in both summer and winter agricultural activities as a means of sustaining their livelihoods. The rural lifestyle gave a space for the children to live together and partake in traditional games. The communal nature of rural life provided them a space for collective play, promoting physical fitness and allowing for showcasing of their athletic abilities through traditional games. Contingent upon time, situation and weather, traditional games are played. Certain traditional games are inclusive of both male and female participants, while some games are exclusively engaged by female or male participants. Additionally, some games are conducted in close proximity to residences or within courtyard. Some games are played in spacious open fields, and some games are played in aquatic environments. By adhering to established game regulations, participants played various traditional games. As per as the regulations of the game is concerned, a diversity of rules in traditional games are observed across different locations. The residents of some places adhere to similar rules for traditional games; but the majority of rural children tend to practice slightly variegated rules during these games. Just as linguistic and cultural regional variations exist, in the same way traditional games also possess their own distinctive sets of regulations. Emphasizing on the difference in traditional games, this discourse stresses the traditional children's water games played in the Kochugaon area within the Kokrajhar district of Bodoland Territorial Region, Assam, India. However, this study does not encompass the other four districts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

2. Aims and Objectives

Focusing on certain objectives, the proposed research has been initiated. The objectives are given below.

- i) To conduct an analysis of the traditional aquatic games prevalent in Bodo villages of Kochugaon.
- ii) To highlight the advantageous and detrimental effects of aquatic games.
- iii) To examine the current status of traditional aquatic games.

3. Significance of the Study

For generations, the Bodo children residing in Kochugaon have been actively engaging in aquatic and various other traditional games. Through their participation in traditional aquatic games, these children reaped the benefits of physical well-being, health consciousness, and emotional balance. Moreover, such participation develops a profound sense of mutual connection and close bonding among the children. However, the facilitators that contribute positively to these games are seldom observed in Kochugaon region. The present young generation is progressively distancing themselves from their interest to learn and participate in traditional games due to various circumstances. These factors adversely affect the present young generation's ability to learn and acquire knowledge pertaining to traditional games. This analysis brings to light the impending reality that, if not addressed, the participation of children in aquatic games may subsequently lead to their complete disappearance. It is mention worthy that traditional games serve as vital representations of cultural elements and the local environment. The traditional aquatic games illustrate the social environment and cultural heritage of Kochugaon. For preservation and revival of traditional aquatic games among Bodo children of Kochugaon, it is serious concerns for stakeholders to initiate efforts aimed at future sustainability and continuity. Emphasizing the importance of preservation and perpetuating traditional aquatic games, this area of study has been undertaken.

4. Methodology

For the proposed study, a descriptive method has been adopted. To outline the literary discourse, both primary and secondary data have been consulted as source of information. The primary source included interviews and field surveys. Furthermore, as secondary sources, research articles and magazines have been consulted.

5. Overview of Kochugaon

Kochugaon constitutes a prominent Bodo dominated region within the Kokrajhar district of Assam. In conjunction with the Bodo community, various other communities, such as the Rabha and Santals also co-inhabit in this region. Currently, Kochugaon is known as a small town or semi-urban area. Surrounding the Kochugaon town, there exist beautiful Bodo villages. The small rivers of the Kochugaon region primarily originate from the neighbouring nation of Bhutan. The availability of these riverine streams has afforded children of Kochugaon who procured the opportunity to engage in traditional aquatic games. Situated approximately four to six kilometers to the southwest, there exist Bodo dominated villages such as Mandari, Khagrabari, Dwimajing and Gurufela. Flowing through these Bodo dominated villages are rivers like gurfela and dotdora, which continues to exist till today. In these rivers, Bodo children from these villages partake in traditional aquatic games. This discussion is centered on the examination of these aquatic recreational activities. The traditional aquatic games are extensively analyzed in the subsequent sections.

6. Discussion

The game that has been played in the societies throughout history is referred to as traditional games. Traditional games are closely associated with the environment. The existence of traditional games is contingent upon the natural world. Natural resources, including plants, leaves, branches, flowers and fruits served as the materials utilized in traditional games. The traditional games of the Bodo community are similarly interconnected with nature. By relying on the natural environment, the traditional games practiced by the Bodos are also conducted.

The origin of the river water game is also related to the reliance on the gift of nature. The traditional aquatic games within the Kochugaon region are broadly presented below.

- i. Hung Sunai Gelenai.
- ii. Thalir Gainai Gelenai
- iii. Onthai Dwnkumanai Gelenai
- iv. Daokha Janai Gelenai
- v. Ambhu Onthai Barhwnai Gelenai
- vi. Sansrinai Gelenai

A broad analysis of six traditional aquatic games is provided below.

i. Hung Sunai Gelenai

Hung Sunai game is one of the traditional aquatic games enjoyed by the Bodo children of Kochugaon. This game is predominantly played by male children. Hung Sunai game is conducted in the river consisting of multiple participants. This game is categorized into two distinct types: a). Daonanwi Hung Sunai and b). Dolor Thananwi Hung Sunai.

ii. Daonanwi Hung Sunai

This game consist more than one player, and before commencement of the game, the male participants assemble on the riverbank. A leader is designated among the players to facilitate the game. The role of the leader entails counting to one, two, and three. Once the leader count of one, two, and three, the entire participants jump into the river from the riverbank and dive beneath the water to reach a predetermined location across the riverbank. The participant who dives and swims underwater to the longest distance is declared the winner of the game. This game not only showcase the children's underwater swimming abilities but also contribute to their overall health benefit of the children. Underwater swimming necessitates significant stamina and energy. Thus, this game helps in maintaining good health among the children. No materials are utilized in this game.

iii. Dolor Thananwi Hung Sunai

Dolor Thananwi Hung Sunai game is another kind of aquatic game played by more than one participant. This game is inclusively played by both male and female participants. At times, male participants exclusively engage in this game, while female participants also play independently without involving male participants. Prior to the initiation of the game, every participant stands on the riverbank. For playing the game, shallow water reaching up to the waist is preferred. Among the players, one instructor is appointed to lead the game. Once the instructor counts to three, the entire participant remains submerged beneath the surface of river water. The participant who remains underwater for the longest duration is declared winner of the game. It is mentioned worthy that, on occasion, the game pay proceed without the presence of an instructor or team leader. In such instances, participants hold their hands together and play the game by remaining submerged underwater. The main objective of interlocking hands beneath the river water is to avoid illegal winning of the game. In the absence of hand holding during game play, the probability of emerging from the water's surface and subsequently re-immersing to claim oneself as a winner becomes possible. It has been observed that children playing underwater activities foster a sense of happiness and unity among peers by cultivating by close interpersonal relationships. Given that this game is breath controlling game; it serves to enhance the respiratory health of participating children. Furthermore, the game is characterized by its paucity of requirement for physical objects for participation.

iv. Thalir Gainai Gelenai:

This particular game is also prevalent among the Bodo community residing in the Kochugaon area. It represents a traditional aquatic sport that is exclusively played by male participants. Normally, this game is conducted in stable water bodies where the current is minimal and the water level ranges from three to four feet. This game

necessitates the involvement of multiple players, with additional children often attending as spectators. During game play, participants submerge their heads beneath the water body allowing their feet above the surface of water in vertical pillar-like formation. The winner of the game is determined based on the long duration of consistent inverted position, with their hands touching the water body and keeping their feet in a straight vertical position above the water's surface. This game provides significant entertainment among the rural children. As the activity demands considerable stamina and energy to stand upside down underwater, it helps in fostering good health benefit to the children involved. Notably, the game is devoid of any material implements. Moreover, it is characterized by the paucity of vocal songs or rhythmic chants. It is interesting to note that, in determining the winner, observers or spectators who remained in close distance begin a numerical countdown, vocalizing numbers sequentially as one, two, three and four.

v. Onthai Dwnkhwmana Gelenai

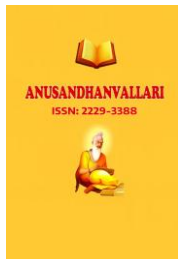
Onthai Dwnkhwmanai Gelenai is one of the traditional games among the Bodos. This game has been actively played by the Bodo children of Kochugaon. The game is inclusive, allowing both male and female children to play collaboratively, without keeping gender barriers. A minimum of four to five participants is required for the game play to commence. The initial step involves the selection of stone that can be easily lifted and carried by participants. After the selection of stone, the next process entails identifying a section of river water having two to three feet in depth with minimal current. Subsequently, a boundary is established, wherein a designated landmark is agreed upon through collective discussion among participants to serve as a hiding spot for the stone. Once the boundary has been delineated, one participant is allowed to conceal the stone by submerging themselves into the water. Before hiding the stone, the hider instructs all the participants to turn backward while counting one, two, and three, followed by the stone is hidden beneath the water. Once the stone is placed into the designated water, the hider asserts 'ok' thereafter the remaining participants dive in the water to search for the stone. When any participant finds the stone, that individual assumes the role of the hider, while the former hider joins the group of seekers. The end of the game is determined by the collective interest of the participants. This game lacks a definitive endpoint. This traditional game promotes socialization, cohesion, joy and amusement among the children. In this game, there is no incorporation of any songs or rhyme; instead, a material object is used as the central element of the game.

vi. Daokha Janai Gelenai

Daokha Khela Gelenai is another traditional game of the Bodo children of Kochugaon that has been played since time immemorial. This game is mostly played by the female children. It is also observed that sometimes, both male and female children collaboratively engage in the game. For engaging in the game, children select a river with water levels reaching their waists or chests. Before initiating the game, the entire participants stand in circular formation within the water. To select the Daokha (crow), the participants sing a song. This song is given below.

*"Ai khol bai khol,
Khokha khol nao khandw,
Dw hwndw baori daokha unish bish"*

The selection of Daokha occurs at the end of the song. When the song reaches its endpoint, an individual among the participants is designated as the Daokha. The role of the Daokha is to chase the other participants in river and touch their heads. The participant who is caught by the Daokha subsequently becomes the next Daokha. The preceding Daokha is released from the role of chaser and joins the group of runners. The cycle of becoming Daokha continues vice versa. This game persists until the participants reach a state of fatigue and exhaustion. This game promotes unity, joy and collaboration. Furthermore, this game prevents children from engaging in undesirable behaviours and evil activities. The Bodo community holds the belief that the Daokha (crow) embodies an evil spirit. Thus, anyone who assumes the role of Daokha endeavours to avoid this designation by becoming energetically chasing the other participants. Indeed, the objective of the participants is to avoid embodying the



characteristics of a crow, which is considered as an evil spirit.

vii. Onthai Embu Barhwnai Gelenai

Among the traditional game of the Bodos, Onthai Embu Barhwnai Gelenai is one of them. Onthai Barhwnai Gelenai means throwing of flat stone onto the surface of the river, causing it to skip similar to frog's leap. This game has been played by the Bodo children residing in the Kochugaon area since time immemorial. This game is exclusively played by the male children. Prior to initiating the game, participants select and pick up flat stone found along the riverbank. After selection of flat stones, all participants stand on the bank of river and subsequently throw them one by one in a skipping motion reminiscent of a frog's jump. The main objective of the participants is to cross their flat stone by throwing to reach the opposite direction of riverbank. The winning of the game is decided based on the participants who successfully dribble the stone with maximum number of times wins the game. This age-old aquatic game promotes entertainment and harmony among the children living in rural areas.

Viii. Sanshrinai Gelenai

Sanshrinai Gelenai represents a significant traditional game. The Bodo children inhabiting the vicinity of the Kochugaon villages actively engage in this recreational activity. This game is played by both male and female children. Depending on specific circumstances, there are instances where each gender maintains their exclusivity in playing. Before engaging the game, all the participants assemble on the riverbank and collectively count one, two, and three. The moment numerical three is uttered, all participants exert themselves to swim across the river with vigor. The bank situated on the opposite side of the river is normally designated as the target point. The individual who first reaches the opposite riverbank wins the game. This game requires considerable stamina and energy for swimming. Children engaging in this traditional aquatic game provide significant health benefits.

7. Advantage and Disadvantage of Aquatic Games

The six traditional aquatic games of Kochugaon have positive and negative effects. These points are highlighted in the following discussion.

Advantage:

The six aquatic games necessitate the use of physical energy. Certain specific games need diving beneath the surface of the water and running through it. There exist instances in which some aquatic games, such as Ambu Barhwnai. This aquatic skipping game demands intensive physical exertion and capability. The engagement of both physical strength and cognitive skills contributes sound health and boost mental well-being. The children develop self-awareness through participation in traditional aquatic games. Participants engage in aquatic games with a degree of caution. Furthermore, children procure enjoyment and amusement from their involvement in aquatic games. A sense of physical hygiene is observed through aquatic games.

Disadvantage:

Aquatic games are normally conducted in river water. At times, longer durations of participation in aquatic games increase the likelihood of health complications. Such intense engagement in aquatic game had negative health consequences. The majority of aquatic games involve running, underwater diving, and inverting the body. The paucity of self awareness about the presence of stones, tree roots, and other sharp objects may occasionally result in head or leg injuries. The instances of such incidents tend to escalate during the rainy season when river water turns unclear, thereby reducing visibility.

8. Present and Future Status of Aquatic Games

Concerning the analysis on traditional aquatic games of the Kochugaon, the paying of such games by Bodo children is hardly observed in rural areas. A significant proportion of children are unfamiliar with the rules or procedures of the games. On the flipside, when elderly persons are asked about the traditional aquatic games, majority of them retrospect and respond that during summer and winter seasons, male and female collectively passed their childhood through aquatic games, which constituted one of their best recreational pursuits in rural life. Such environments, however, are not prevalent in the contemporary childhood experience. At present, the majority of children are not engaged in traditional aquatic games; instead, they are busy at home with personal academic achievements. In addition, some children are actively involved in electronic devices and online games. Some parents have relocated from rural areas to under centers along with their children. The use of chemical feticides in agricultural fields contaminates the river water. Moreover, dumping of waste materials and animal carcasses leads to the contamination of clean water sources. The issues of water pollution, contamination, and the prevalence of river borne diseases have raised a serious concern among parents, prompting them to hinder their children from engaging in aquatic games in river waters. Such factors have prevented the children from engaging in aquatic games. Thus, it is evident that the participation of Bodo children in traditional aquatic games is decreasing in the Kochugaon area. The present condition of the traditional aquatic games needs coordinated efforts for revival and preservation of cultural heritage. The time has come where older persons, possessing extensive experience in traditional aquatic games, are to be solicited for their insights and subsequently documented in a written form. Furthermore, workshops, seminars and competitive events are to be organized with the intention of safeguarding these traditions. If such initiatives are not undertaken by the conscious residents of Kochugaon, the rich cultural heritage may result in zero prevalence.

9. Conclusion

It has come to light that the Bodo children residing in Kochugaon have engaged in six traditional aquatic games. These recreational activities afforded vital opportunities for collective participation among children involving joy, entertainment, and representation of athletic abilities. It is noteworthy that traditional games has a plethora of health benefits; Also, the Bodo children of Kochugaon are benefited with physical well-being through their participation in these aquatic games. These aquatic games have facilitated the development of unity and strong interpersonal bonds among children. Such kinds of childhood bondings are seldom observed among contemporary children. Intense occupation of children within domestic confines has limited their opportunities for outdoor recreational activities. For these reasons, the concept of building a cohesive environment unity and friendship among has been gradually decreasing in the present era. Through traditional aquatic games, every child is afforded the avenue to excel in swimming and develop an athletic spirit. The swimming abilities helped the residents of Kochugaon to cross rivers to access markets and various places. Despite the observable health benefits, the present young generation within the Bodo community appears to be on the verge of neglecting these traditions. Such negligence of traditional aquatic games has resulted in decline in the cultural heritage of associated with the Kochugaon area. Traditional games represent as a significant emblem of cultural identity. Traditional games reflect the social and cultural dynamics of a particular region. Individuals belonging to different communities have undergone transformations. Such changes from rural society to urban society are evident. Due to the effects of urbanization, several practices associate with traditional games are not give due importance in contemporary society. Some children residing in urban areas are unable to access free space for participation in traditional games. The Bodo children residing in town area couldn't afford the opportunity to participate in traditional games. If the children continue to disengage from traditional games, this may result in a loss of cultural heritage and an alienation from their cultural roots, ultimately resulting in a cultureless society. The distinct cultural identity is likely to erode gradually. In the interest of safeguarding the cultural identity of the Bodo community, it is crucial for the individuals to take proactive measures to preserve traditional games. If such initiatives are undertaken by the community, the cultural heritage and traditional games will be safeguarded and sustained.

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